

# 10 THINGS

# *Every*

**PRINCIPAL OR ADMINISTRATOR**

Needs to Know About  
Marketing Their  
School



The educational environment in the United States has changed dramatically over the past twenty years. In the 80's and early 90's, there existed two types of schools: public schools and private schools. Generally, private schools were the purview of the wealthy or of parents seeking a more faith oriented environment.

However, with the introduction and growth of charter schools, the environment for schools has become much more fractured and competitive. Schools now find themselves having to actively compete to attract and retain students. It is no longer enough for a school to provide strong academic outcomes. To attract enough students for a school to accomplish its' mission, they must quickly learn how to effectively market their school to prospective and current parents.

Many schools have struggle with this shift. Traditional administrative training programs for principals do not cover marketing or how to most effectively promote your school. Many principals and administrators are struggling in this new environment and don't know where to begin to develop a marketing strategy for their school.

At Bright Minds Marketing, we have worked with dozens of schools across the country who have recognized that marketing needs to become a strength of their school. Through our work with schools, we have identified the top 10 things that every principal or head of enrollment needs to understand as they begin to create a marketing plan for their school.

Though this list is not exhaustive, it should give you a strong foundation to refer to as you begin to develop your marketing programs



# 1

## Marketing is not just advertising

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This is a common misconception. Though advertising is part of marketing, it is just a part. Marketing is about understanding;

- 1 Understanding the environment that you operate in,
- 2 Understanding what your customers look like and want,
- 3 Understanding where is the best place to tell your story to your customer.

Many schools want to instantly jump into developing tactics and spraying them across multiple channels. This can lead to a waste of time and money, two things that no school has enough of. If you can take a pause and think strategically and try to understand those three things, then your marketing, or how you tell your story, will be much more effective.



# 2

## Don't wait until you are in crisis to begin marketing

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A marketing plan should be a foundational piece of your school's operational plan, just like your curriculum. It should be updated yearly and constantly tweaked as you find success or challenges.

Developing a good marketing plan takes time and should be regarded as investing in the future health of your school. Making the investment when you are strong is going to be a lot easier than when you are scrambling with lower enrollment and fewer resources.

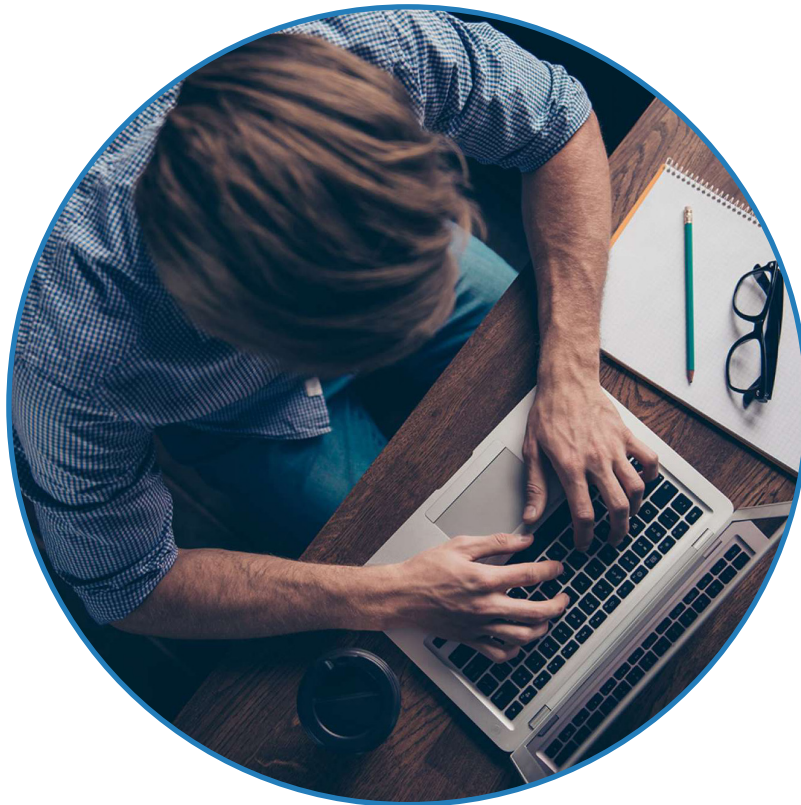
And, don't starve your marketing budget when times get tough. If anything, that is when you need to invest more resources. Though it is somewhat of a commercial thing to say, you have to spend money to make money.



# 3

## Marketing never stops

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There is no “recruiting season”. You may be spending more time in the winter months promoting your school, but that doesn’t mean that you should ignore your marketing efforts for the rest of the year. A constant presence and awareness with your prospects will make it much easier to drive action when it is time for your open house or to entice them to request a school tour.

One of the worst crutches for schools was the designation of Catholic Schools Week and School Choice Week. Some schools believe that this is the best (and only) time to promote their school. If all your recruitment events happen during these weeks in January, stop doing that immediately!

You need to be doing something every day to increase awareness of your school and entice people to consider your school.

# 4

## Data is your friend, but analysis is your spouse

Data is going to guide you and tell you what you need to do in your marketing and recruiting, but only if you collect it and analyze it. It can be cumbersome to gather data, and challenging to analyze it, but this is the best way to diagnose and focus on fixing your enrollment challenges.

At the very minimum you need to track and analyze the following data:

- » 5-year enrollment trends by grade
- » Retention by grade
- » Open house numbers and closure rate (total enrolled/total that attended) from open houses.
- » Leads generated by different marketing programs

Data will tell you where you are successful and where you have opportunities for improvement. By knowing what you need to fix, you become more effective and can focus on more of the quick wins.



# 5

## Fail to plan, plan to fail

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You need to write out a marketing plan. Understanding your data will allow you to understand where your students are coming from and where there are available potential students. Having a year-long marketing plan will allow you to build a well thought out and executable market strategy to get those prospective students. But remember that a marketing plan is a living document. As

you try things and see the success of different marketing tactics, update the plan so you are constantly getting better.

This is also very important when you are attempting to get consensus or assistance in your marketing program. Having a written marketing plan with assigned tasks to different volunteers and faculty members will allow you to leverage all of the resources at your disposal. Marketing takes work. Having a plan allows you to assign work and helps you to effectively utilize staff to ensure a strong marketing effort.

# 6

## Understand your customer

What does your customer look like? What does she want in her child's school? Where does she look for information about schools? If you can answer three questions, you have gone a long way to crafting an effective marketing message. By analyzing your customer's demographics; age, income, race, location, you have a pretty good idea of some baseline targeting information. This can help you as you purchase lists for door to door canvassing or digital advertising.

By understanding her needs and desires for her child's school, you can then craft your marketing message to show that you are the school that best fulfills her needs. Be careful in assuming that every parent wants "a quality education". That phrase means different things to different people and some parents will choose a school for reasons that may surprise you. This is especially important if you are a school that has a similar offering as other nearby schools.



A good example of this is the automotive marketplace. Marketers that work for car companies understand that the typical buyer for a Volvo is quite different than the typical buyer for a Ford F-150 pick-up truck.

There is nothing wrong with either customer segment. One is not better than the other, but both represent different needs. F-150 buyers are more traditionally men who value utility whereas a typical Volvo buyer is more likely to be a middle-aged man or woman with a family who values safety. Both of these potential customers want to go from point A to point B (a quality education), but there are other things that drive their purchase.

By understanding your customer and what he or she is seeking, you are much more effective in how you advertise and where you advertise.



## Know what sets you apart

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To effectively compete in a competitive school environment, you need to offer parents and students an experience that is unique to your school. Do a competitive analysis of the other schools around you. Look at all the schools within a 5-mile radius of your school. These are all the other choices that a parent can make.

What can a parent get at your school that they couldn't get somewhere else? Is your uniqueness something that truly resonates with a customer's need or aspiration? Is your unique aspect understandable by the customer?

Don't fall into the trap of saying that we are "a family" or "a community". While that might be true (though I guarantee you, some parents don't feel that way about your school), every school is saying the same thing.

What is your Wow factor? What is the thing that a parent hears about from your school that they want their child to experience it? What is the thing that they wished they would have had when they were a student? What is your Wow? If you don't have one, make one!

## Customers will interact with your online presence first

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Your demographic is the Millennial Generation. This generation doesn't know a world without the internet. When thinking about your school, they will almost always go to your website first. Is your website enticing to a potential new customer? Is it easy for prospective parents to find information about your school? Your website is your digital "curb appeal." Make sure that it is enticing for potential parents.

Remember that most traffic on the internet is now conducted via a mobile phone or tablet. If your website is not mobile enabled/optimized, not only will you be pushed down in the rankings by the search engines, but you are giving a poor experience to customers who are trying to learn about your school via their mobile device.

And this is most important for schools that serve a lower income student. Not everyone has a desktop computer. Most lower income parents will look at your site via their mobile phone. If it is a poor experience, they may never interact with you in person.

## Word of mouth takes effort

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Word of mouth is going to be your prime source of student referrals. But word of mouth marketing is not doing nothing and hoping parents are saying good things about your school.

Word of mouth is the best marketing program, but it does take work. Don't just hope that parents are saying good things, actively work to ensure that they are. Have you asked your parents to actively post positive reviews about you to the various online school review sites? These sites are one of the first places parents will go when they are researching your school. If you don't have any reviews, or even worse, negative ones, parents may stop considering you and move on to the next school on their list.

Have you created parental ambassadors that can follow up with potential families or host back yard bar-b-ques? Word of mouth is very effective, but don't confuse word of mouth with hope. Hoping that people are saying good things about you is not an effective marketing strategy.



## Personal touches will set you apart

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Little things can matter as customers are making the decision on which school is right for their child(ren). If the customer expresses an interest in your arts program during the school tour, are you having the art teacher conduct a follow up call after the tour? Are you sending thank you notes to people who attended your open house? Little things like this can often tip the scales towards your school and they generally don't cost any money. It just takes a little bit extra work.







## *About the author:*

Nick LeRoy is the founder and principal consultant of Bright Minds Marketing. For over 15 years, LeRoy served as a global brand manager in the pharmaceutical industry, working on several billion-dollar brands. LeRoy spent two years as the Executive Director of the Indiana Charter School Board where he provided regulatory oversight over a portfolio of over a dozen charter schools.

Bright Minds Marketing has partnered with dozens of schools across the United States to help them to better understand their customers and to tell their story more effectively.

If you would like to improve your student enrollment, you can contact Bright Minds Marketing for a free consultation call.

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